XIO3

GCACE

Garden City Atari Computer Enthusiasts

1003 Amphion St. Victoria, B.C. Canada V8S 4G2

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1997

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ATARI® News and Rumours

by Rowland Grant

Atari lives! Kind of. Back in 1984, Warner's Atari Inc. subsidiary was losing big money. Warner wanted out. Jack Tramiel had left Commodore, and was looking for something to do. So Warner's representatives phoned Garry Tramiel, who at that time was working for Merill-Lynch in Sunnyvale. Warner sold a 68 percent interest in Atari's consumer product division (computers and game consoles) to the Tramiels for a $240 million long term note. This became Atari Corp. But Warner kept the profitable arcade game division, and retained the Atari trade mark for its coin-op machines. Atari Corp is gone, folded into JTS. Warner sold its coin-op division to Williams. However, Williams is still using the Atari label. And why not? At one time Atari ranked almost as high as Coca-Cola in brand name recognition. So Atari does live as a brand name for arcade coin-op systems. The Atari label is now 25 years old. In August an Atari Alumni Reunion was held in San Jose to celebrate 25 years of arcade machine development, from Pong to San Francisco Rush. Those people who worked only for the Tramiels were not invited.

Bad news from JTS. Revenue for the second quarter of the current fiscal year is expected to be lower than the first quarter. This means a continuing loss. JTS blames the decline on a weakening of the hard drive market in general. JTS drives currently on the market are being well received. The new 3 gigabyte drives have been reported to be faster, quieter and cheaper than the competition. It is rumoured that this quality has been achieved by careful testing, and there have been a lot of rejects at the plant. That's where some of the loss came from. JTS must make a profit soon or it will be out of business.

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CREDITS

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MEMBERSHIP

Membership dues are $25 per family per year. Membership includes a subscription to this newsletter, access to over 1000 8-bit public domain disks and 199 ST disks and increased time and upload/download ratio on the club BBS, Pothole. It can be reached by modem at (604) 642-6795.

MEETINGS

Meetings will be held in the Nellie McClung branch of the Library at 3950 Cedar Hill Road (corner of McKenzie) on the fourth Thursday of each month. All meetings are at 7 pm. There is no meeting in the month of December.

EDITORIAL

Garden City A.C.E. would like to extend condolences to George and Marlene Rose, who lost their 19 year old grandson in a tragic motorcycle accident in Port Alberni recently. We're thinking of both of you and your loss.

John Towler will demonstrae CAB and STiK and how to get around on the World Wide Web at September's meeting. I recently attended a meeting at the Victoria Freenet (now to be known as the Victoria Telecomminication Association) that concerned setting up Web pages for non-profit societies on the Freenet at no charge. It seems that when they get their new software and hardware, it will include providing graphics on the Web. Currently the Freenet only offers text based Web access. Now that free access to the WWW is available, I guess I'll have to CAB and STiK and learn how to use them.

Gord

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Apple Macintosh	John Towler	382-5083
Commodore Amiga	Ted Skrecky	598-6173
IBM's and clones	Rowland Grant	598-3661
	Bob Nex	642-6358

PEEKing Around

by Gordon F Hooper



... Welcome to CLIFF BOUVETTE, who is rejoining after a few years absence. He has agreed to take on the job of 8-bit librarian. RON LUKAWITSKI also rejoined. He makes his living as a musician and is really getting into MIDI with a Falcon computer. He upgraded from a Mega4 STE ... JOHN TOWLER spent part of his summer in Montreal watching the Canadian Grand Prix, a Formula 1 event ... DANE STEGMAN from New York e-mailed his thanks to ROWLAND GRANT, who mailed a WordPerfect manual to him ... Rowland has been busy all summer scraping paint and then repainting his house. It's still in progress ... Someone from one of the violent games he plays must be out to get the CyberLord. Someone set the lobby of TED SKRECKY'S condo on fire recently. Fortunately, damage was confined to the lobby and no one was injured. The CyberTwit told me the fire started around midnight, but he didn't wake up to the smell of smoke until 3 am. Seems he sleeps with ear plugs and didn't hear the fire alarm. He exited through the lobby, disturbing the firemen who were in the cleaning up stage by then ...

IF MICROSOFT MADE TV DINNERS

You must first remove the plastic cover, but understand that it means agreeing to accept and honor Microsoft rights to all TV dinners. You may not give anyone else a bite of your dinner (which would constitute an infringement of Microsoft's rights). They may, however, smell and look at your dinner. You must tell them how good it is.

If you have a PC microwave oven, insert the dinner into the oven.

Set the oven using these keystrokes: mstv.dinn/08.5min@50%heat

You then enter: ms//start.cook_dindin/yummy/yumyum/goto#cookme

If you have an Atari oven, insert the dinner and press start. The oven will set itself and cook the dinner.

Be forewarned that Microsoft dinners are subject to frequent crashes, in which case your oven must be restarted. This is a simple procedure.

Remove the dinner from the oven and enter: ms.nodamn.good/tryagain/again/again/.crap

This process may have to be repeated, and might solve your problem.

Many users have reported that the dinner tray is far too big, larger than the dinner itself, having many useless compartments, most of which are empty. Microsoft says these are for future menu items.

However, the tray is so large that it will only fit in the largest industrial ovens, forcing many users to upgrade.

Dinners are only available from registered outlets, and only the chicken variety is currently produced. If you want another variety, call Microsoft Help and they will explain that you really do not want another variety. Microsoft Chicken is all you really want or need.

Microsoft has disclosed plans to discontinue all smaller versions of their chicken dinners. Future releases will only be in the larger family size. Excess chicken may be stored for future use, but must be saved only in Microsoft approved packaging. Users get excited about having veggies with their Microsoft dinners, often telling their friends about it, as though this were something new. Microsoft promises a dessert with every dinner after 1998. However, that version has yet to be released. Users have permission to get thrilled in advance.

The box for the TV dinners is so large that it will not fit in many smaller freezers, and the shape prevents the storage of any other brand of dinners. Microsoft dinners are often not compatible with other dinners in the freezer, causing your freezer to self-defrost. Calling Microsoft Help will elicit the explanation that your freezer probably should have been defrosted anyway.

... Phone GORD at 475-0857 with any news of dirty deeds by fellow GCACE members ...

Power Without the Price!

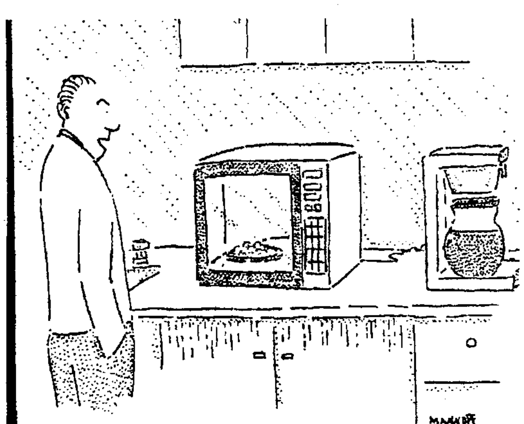
by Doug Skrecky

Message #7
Date: Tue Jun 3 20:43:08 1997
From: oberon@vcn.bc.ca (Doug Skrecky)
Subject: Something for X103
To: ua558@freenet.victoria.bc.ca (Gordon Hooper)

Here's an interesting ad I found in the June 10, 1997 edition of PC magasine:

Atari 64-BIT Jaguar

We like it better than Nintendo 64! $59.99
Plus we include 3 games!
D55-6111 Atari Jaguar System, Includes Cypermorph, Checkered Flag and Kasumi Ninja $59.99
D55-6101 Additional 18 button controller $19.99
Also available: Jaguar Game Packs! Call for details.



No, I don't want to play chess. I just want you to reheat the lasagna.

Continued from Page 1

I notice that ICD is still in the Atari business. The Catbox interface for the Jaguar game console allows up to 8 systems to be connected. Thus up to 8 players can take part in one game, if the software allows it. ICD had about 10 Catboxes remaining unsold. They sold out when the multi-player game Aircars was released. Because of the revived demand, Tom Harker is planning on making more Catbox units. However he needs to sell 100 to make it worth while. If he gets 100 preorders, Tom will do another run of Catboxes. Also, if there is enough interest, Dark Knight Games of Nashua NH will make a high quality joystick for the Atari Jaguar. They need 140 preorders to go ahead. The Jaguar uses a game pad. For certain games such as Blue Lightning, AirCars, Hoverstrike and the forthcoming Battlesphere, a joystick would be ideal. The joystick comes with three buttons and the numeric keypad. There is a Pro model with six buttons.

JagFest, held in July, involved many Jaguar consoles displaying about every Jaguar game available. And they displayed at least one game that is not yet available. This was Battlesphere, running on a four console network. Apparently 15 coding days are still required to finish Battlesphere. There are a few obscure bugs that cause it to lock up infrequently. But in its present stage, the game was rated "fabulous". This sentiment was seconded by, a professional programmer, who pointed out that the 4-Play team "... with poor developer tools and buggy aging hardware, in their [spare] time without much hope of financial returns ... [have created] the most technically advanced Jaguar game the unit will ever have." Also present was the company Visual Dimensions 3D which is doing games for a number of platforms. They had nothing to display, but did describe two Jaguar games under development. One is called "Automaniacs", a driving game, and the other is "Def-Con 1", a tomb raider type game.

The MIST show in Indianapolis: "... Possibly the last Atari show in the US."

The MIST show in Indianapolis followed the Jagfest. This was for ST computers. It was billed as "Possibly the last Atari Show in the United States". They may be right. One sign of the times: Compuserve closed all of its Atari forums. Fortunately the Atari world does not depend on Compuserve.

In 1988, after three years on the market, the installed base of ST's in the United States was no more than 50 thousand. The reason for this was the rapid decline in price of the PC-XT clone. In 1988 the XT clone was no more expensive than a 1040ST, and there was a lot more support for the clones. In addition, while the ST and monitor were cheap, the peripherals were expensive. So a clone with a hard drive would cost less than a similarly equipped ST. Of course the ST was still a much better computer. But for most businesses the bottom line cost and the available software made the clones appear to be a better investment. This is still true with clones today. In Germany there was a special situation. The universities tended to train their computer science students using the Motorola 68000 series CPU. The architecture of the 68000 closely parallels mainframe standards. So there were many potential programmers available, programmers who would understand and appreciate the ST's virtues. The other 68000 based computers were the Macintosh and the Amiga. In Germany the Mac was very expensive, as was the Amiga. There were few PC clones. So Germany was just the right market for the Atari ST. Under shrewd local guidance, Atari became one of Germany's major computer companies.

The ST software was excellent, plentiful, and locally produced in German for the German market. The ST in Germany was a business and professional computer. Many are still in use. The installed base of ST computers has dwindled by now, but in Germany it is still large enough to keep a few small companies busy. The market outside of Germany is so tiny that in some cases it is not worth the cost of translating documents and config files. For instance, Papillon has been said to be the best bitmap drawing software available for the ST, but it is not distributed outside of Germany. A recent example is the new Jinnee desktop by ASH. Now ASH does serve the world market, however the translating to English is done by Systems Solution in Britain, they are very selective and slow. So the latest versions of products from Germany are usually months late, and some may never be available.

I understand that Crystal Atari Browser 2.5 is now available in English. It is sold by ASH, and comes packaged with PPP-Connect and other software. In order to use the PPP software and some features of CAB, a pre-emptive multi-tasking operating system is needed. Naturally, ASH is recommending its MagiC operating system. There was a rumour that OXO Systems in France had gone out of business. OXO was developing web accessing software called Wensuite. Some have reported that the OXO web site is still there, but it has not been updated and E-mail is not acknowledged. There was some discussion on the net over whether OXO was dead or just restin'

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after a long squawk. Suddenly Voom! There was E-mail from OXO that the French language version of Wensuite 2.01e has been released. Now there are more reports that OXO has become dormant again.

Up to now the most popular system for net browsing has been the shareware version of CAB combined with STiK, a TCP/IP stack. With it are a host of modules and accessories such as Telnet, duFTP, Newsie, Finger, Antmail etc. that allow full use of the net and web. STiK does not handle PPP protocols, but there are rumours that this extension is being developed. There is another freeware stack called STiNG that seems to work with CAB and some of the popular modules. Peter Rottengatter has issued a new version 1.06 of STiNG that does handle PPP protocols. So far a lot of users have had trouble with it. And a few have reported that STiNG works great. At least there is a lot of effort being made to keep the Atari community on the web.

Tony Greenwood of STOSSER Software has released the game H.E.R.O.2 for STe and Falcon computers. The original STOS programming language does not work on the later Atari computers. And this was the case with the original H.E.R.O. game. However H.E.R.O.2 is a modified version with additions that need 4MB of memory. The game is freeware, as are all STOSSER productions.

An update on Bad Mood, a Doom clone for the Falcon. The game control software or 'engine' is almost finished. However, the detailed graphics and the 'intelligence' routines for the monsters still need work. This is a cooperative project over the net. More volunteer programmers are needed. The current demo allows the player to move through the scenery and see the monsters, but no interaction is possible.

Phillipe Gerin of Belgium has released a beta version of a new ST emulator. It runs on the Macintosh and is called NoSTalgia. Humm, No ST, clever name anyway. On another note, the English version of Papyrus version 5.15 is now available. Papyrus is probably the only word/document processor still being upgraded for the Atari platforms. However, Silverdock Ltd., the current owner of Protext is promising a new release of its venerable word processor. Currently Protext 6.7 is a consolidation of previous releases, however the manual has been thoroughly revised. The PC version will be published first. However the ST/TT/Falcon version is promised soon.

Centek in France is still developing its Phenix line of computers. The circuitry for the model using a Motorola 68040 is not the same as the model using the 68060. The 68040 model runs at 33MHz, whereas the 68060 will run at 80 MHz with the circuit itself optimized at 40 MHz. The 68040 model seems to be nearest to completion. The estimated price is between $1400 and $1800 (US). This includes 16MB RAM, 1.2GB SCSI Hard drive and a 12x CD-ROM, 16 bit audio card etc. The Phenix uses the DOLMEN operating system optimized for the 68040 processor. Centek is looking for software developer support for DOLMEN. Hmm, remove the D and L and we get OMEN, another powerful operating system. There is no mention now of Phenix computers using TOS or GEM, or of DOLMEN running on other platforms. A new computer based on the 680x0? I don't think that this will sell.

While there is a selection of TT/Falcon clones available still, most of us are just trying to keep our old computers going. Best Electronics is now the main source for Atari computer parts. The latest catalogue is revision 10. This took three years to prepare, because Best was adding new stock faster than the catalogue could be updated. By the time that they cleared out 3500 pallets of parts and things from JTS's Atari warehouse, Best had over 2000 new items to add to the catalogue. So Rev 10 is a complete rewrite, a historical document with over 300 illustrations. It is big and heavy. The shipping costs almost as much as the catalogue itself. Price is $7.50. Shipping to Canada is an additional $6.95. Best says that it has enough parts to keep Atari computers going for another ten years. Bless 'em.

Best will keep Atari computers going for another 10 years. Bless 'em.

S.A.M. Available

by Rowland Grant

Atari produced an 80 column peripheral, the XEP80, late in the life of the Atari XE. In order that it would work with any 8-bit Atari, the XEP80 plugged into a joystick port. A monochrome 80 column monitor connected to the XEP80. Before using the XEP80, it was necessary to install a software driver. Any software using the editor routines (E: device) in the Atari 8-bit ROM would show up in 80 columns. Because the XEP80 turned up so late, only two commercial word processors, AtariWriter80 and Turboword, were designed to use it. But some programmers did fashion software for their own use. Stan Lackey admired the EMACS text editor used by UNIX systems, so he made a version to be used with the Atari XEP80. He calls it EMAX. It has many of the features of the UNIX version including macro handling. The program code is only 5.5K bytes, which leaves lots of room for text. There are two versions. One is EMAXR, which resides under the ROM on an XL/XE. This gives over 38K for text with DOS present. EMAXR only works with DOS 2 or compatibles. The other version is EMAXS which works with all Atari 8-bit computers, and is compatible with SpartaDOS as well. EMAX has a surprising number of editing commands. The key sequences that control them can be redefined. Several text buffers can be maintained, which makes moving blocks of text easy. There are disk file commands, even subdirectories can be accessed. EMAX does not have all the printing features of a word processor, however one can send printer code sequences to set the printer prior to printing the text. Printer escape codes can be embedded in the text too. Best of all, EMAX has been released as public domain. Even the source code is available for those who enjoy looking under the hood.

There are other editors that use the E: device in ROM and will turn up in 80 columns with the XEP80. The MAE assembler editor will run in 80 columns. The previous MAE editor was a stand alone program, and it too will work with the XEP80. Thomas Havemeister reports that another public domain editor called KEdit should work with the XEP80. Unlike EMAX, the latest version of KEdit can use bank switched memory for text buffers, up to 320K anyway. Of course there are 80 column text systems that do not use XEP80. Most of them use a modified character set and a Graphics 8 display. I have one in an alternate ROM called OMNIVIEW. It came with a word processor called OmniWriter. The characters are designed to be easily read, but they are not nearly as clear as the hardware driven XEP80 display which has double the resolution.

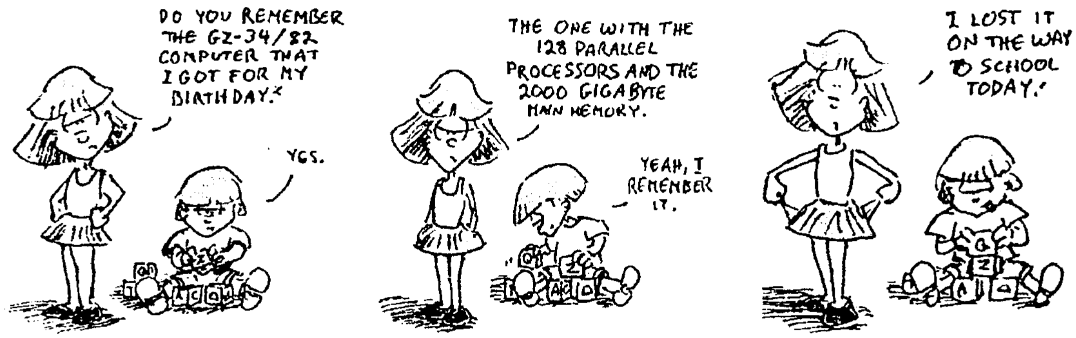
Then there is S.A.M., the Screen Aided Management package produced by Power Per Post in Germany. This provides an 80 column desktop environment which can be controlled using a joystick or ST mouse. The desktop does all the standard DOS functions. The package is supplied with an 80 column word processor (SAM Texter), colour and monochrome character set editors, a card filing database, a ML monitor and a 128 colour paint program (SAM Painter). On a separate disk is SAM BUDGET, an 80 column spreadsheet that runs under SAM. Another disk contains SAM UTILITY EXTENSIONS. These convert the text from the SAM word processor format into ASCII and vice versa. Also SAM Painter format files can be converted to and from Micro Painter format. Included is SAM DESIGNER, a drawing and design package using graphics 8. This program can import text from SAM Texter. It has a set of schematic icons for creating circuit diagrams. Other icons can be created using the SAM character editor. The whole SAM package can be obtained from Dean Garraghty Software for about 15 pounds (UK).

Tom Hunt has announced that an on-line discussion list called atari8-l has started. It is meant to bring interested Atari 8-bit coders together to work on joint projects. The proposal is to develop a UNIX style operating system similar to one already running on the Commodore 64. Also for discussion are programs that can be run under the system such as TCP/IP stacks and SLIP or PPP protocols etc. Sounds interesting.

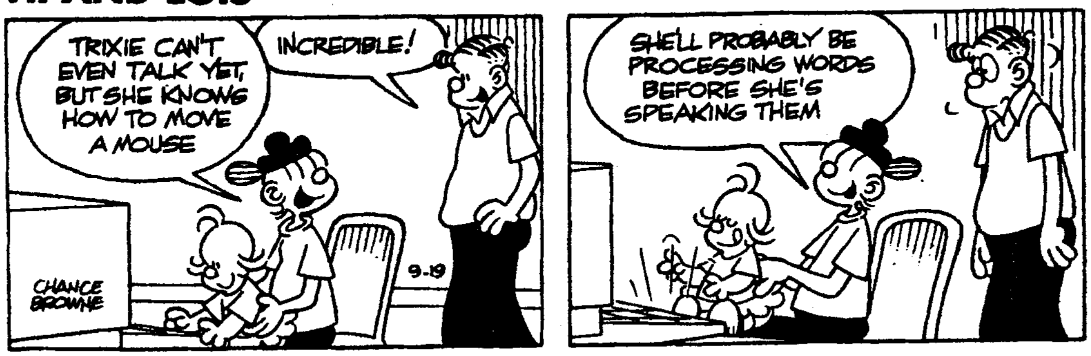
There are rumours that some time ago FTE (Fine Tooned Engineering) had a fire in its warehouse. FTE had a lot of debts, so the damaged stock was auctioned off and cleared. There may be some stock left, but FTE is out of business. Does FTE still hold the rights to the Newell, OSS and ICD 8-bit hardware and software? And if not, who does?

Last year there was a lot of talk about a HTML version of Mapping the Atari. The author, Ian Chadwick, has the copyright. he supported the project but nothing has been heard of it since. However, the Atari System Reference Manual is available on the web. So anyone wishing to begin programming the Atari 8-bit can still find support.

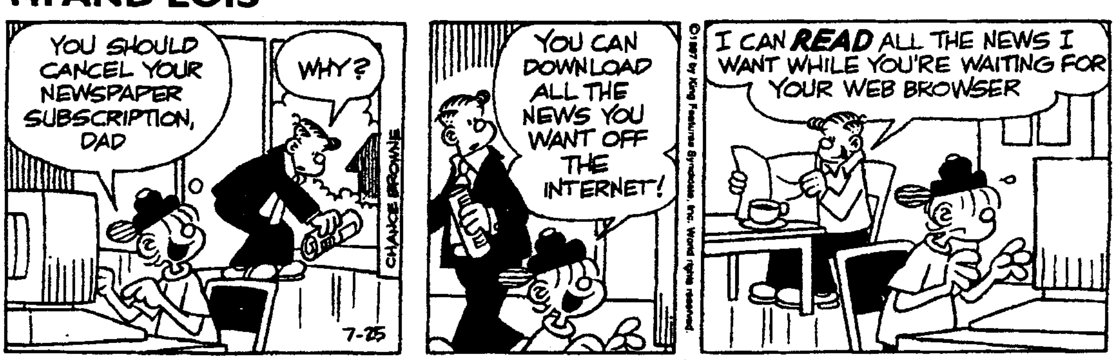
Two years ago Ernest Schreurs and his friends produced the POOLDISK CD ROM that contained the equivalent of 2300 Atari 8-bit diskettes in ATR format. Now they are working on a new version, POOLDISK II. A stack of new diskettes of Dutch software has been acquired. And donations from private collections of PD software are being solicited. There will be a lot of digitised images, including photos of Atari 8-bit equipment. Ernest reports that they made a bit of money on the first disk at $35 a copy. So they can afford to sell the next release for somewhat less. They are not interested in making money it seems. They are interested in supporting the Atari 8-bit hobby. It's this spirit that is keeping the ol' Atari alive.



HI AND LOIS



HI AND LOIS



Computer Interest Slump?

by Rowland Grant

I was unable to attend the July general meeting. And nobody has reported or even commented on the July meeting, so I won't either. We are having difficulty finding demonstrations to feature at the meetings. Usually it's the executive that comes up with something. Are we in a computer interest slump? Fortunately, Craig Carmichael is doing interesting things. Just lately, Craig has been very interested in digitised colour imaging, and at the August meeting he showed us some of his findings. First, with his trusty TT, Craig showed us a colour image running at maximum available resolution. He lowered the resolution (pixels per inch) which made the image rather ragged at the edges. Then he showed how the image can be improved by a process called dithering. This process substitutes various pixel colours on the colour boundaries to shade or merge the edges. It's all mathematical of course. The algorithm used by the software makes use of a selection of matrices. A particular matrix of numbers gives a typical effect. Sometimes the smaller matrix yields more information, that is to say, you can make out more details. In his demonstration, Craig showed a variety of dithered treatments of a single image. One of these dithered images looked very rough close up. But further away the image came out clearly with details unperceived even in the high resolution version. It was like an oil painting that looks best when seen from a distance. This effect is different using different media. When Craig printed the images in colour, they did not look like the screen images. Different dithering is required for colour printing. This was a striking demonstration not only of computer imaging, but of eye-mind perception and media characteristics. Craig is continuing his research into this.

Computers Taking Over?

by Gordon F Hooper

A recent news report datelined Reuters, Newcastle, states a British scientist says robots could eventually threaten mankind and experts should start looking at ways of curbing their power before it is too late.

"This is the whole of the human race (at risk) if we let it go ... It is possibly a bigger issue than human genetics," Professor Kevin Warwick told a news conference.

I really needed to know that. As if life didn't have enough concerns, we are madly manufacturing more. Not only do I have to worry about getting hit by a logging truck while jaywalking across Douglas Street, now everytime I sit at the computer I have to worry that all those diabolical silicone chips are plotting to take over humankind.

I read further and learned that experiments today show robots can already learn from their own experiences and from other machines they are linked up to directly. The next stage is for robots to communicate with each other over the Internet.

Excuse me. I've just returned from flushing my modem down the toilet. Them suckers ain't gonna sneak up on me one night when I'm blissfully asleep and they're burning up cyberspace over the phone lines with schemes to supplant the human race. No sirree. I'm cutting myself off from all computers.

That'll mean no phone, no cable TV, no car, no plane rides, no buying from stores, no electricity, no doctor ... oops, I guess computers are involved in just about every aspect of modern life. Thank God my toilet is still non-computerized or I probably wouldn't be able to flush my opinion of modern society every morning, and that could get unsanitary real quick. I guess I'll have to make some exceptions. As a matter of fact, this is being written on a computer and I'm sure as hell not going back to a typewriter. I used to have to type out manuscripts 27 times before I got one that was reasonably close enough to being acceptable to a magazine editor. That is the problem. Computers are involved with just about every aspect of modern life.

Probably if I wait another five years, I won't have to worry about modern life. At the moment I drive a 1980 Dodge Aspen, because I like a lot of metal around me in case of accident and I truly believe in V8 power driven through the rear wheels (it's worked peachy-keen since the early 1900s and I can still repair it in my backyard), I still have a stereo with only a record player because I spent major dollars on records in my youth and I use an Atari computer because I like technology that works without major problems.

The tehno-geeks think I should have been buried 15 years ago.